

Name: _____ Class: _____

Joan of Arc: France's Young Tragic Hero

By David White
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The following article is about the historical figure Joan of Arc, or Jeanne D'Arc (1412-1431), the teenage girl who led the French to victory against the English in the 1400s. As you read, take notes on how Joan of Arc succeeded in gaining her command and winning in battle. How and why is she remembered today?

Part 1: The Makings of a Hero

- [1] Joan was born the youngest of a family of five. Her father was a peasant farmer who had little money. She never learned to read or write. Yet in her short lifetime, she became one of history's most famous people.

Joan was born in Domremy on January 6, 1412. She was the youngest of five children. As a child, Joan played with other children but also enjoyed being alone. Like other girls, she was good at sewing and spinning. Unlike other girls, she claimed to hear "voices." She said it was the voice of angels speaking to her, and she also claimed to have seen them. She had always been especially devoted to her religion, Christianity.

She began to hear these voices in 1425, when she was 13. Three years later, she was convinced that God had spoken to her and told her to go to the service of the king, Charles VII.¹

The French at this time were involved in another war against the English. (The two countries had fought many wars before that time, including the Hundred Years War.)²

- [5] In the current struggle, things were going badly for France. In 1428, Joan traveled to the neighbouring town of Vaucouleurs to see the king's commander there, Robert Baudricourt.³ This man first turned Joan away with a laugh. But the next year, when Joan correctly predicted a great French defeat outside Orleans (the Battle of the Herrings), Baudricourt was willing to listen. In fact, he let Joan go to the king himself, who was at the French city of Chinon.



"Jeanne d'Arc, victorieuse des anglais, rentre à Orléans et est acclamée par la population" by Jean Jacques Scherrer is in the public domain.

1. King Charles VII (1403-1461) of France ruled from 1422 until his death.
2. The Hundred Years War was a series of conflicts waged from 1337 to 1453, fought between England and France.
3. Robert de Baudricourt (c. 1400-1454) was a minor figure of 15th century French nobility.

Joan convinced King Charles VII of her sincerity and of her calling to help France defend itself against the English invaders. Despite the advice of most of his commanders, King Charles agreed with Joan, offering her a sword. Joan, however, spoke of a vision that she had of a great sacred sword buried in a nearby chapel. No one knew about this sword, but the king was so convinced that Joan was right that he ordered the area under the altar dug up. There was an ancient sword, just as Joan described it. Astonished, King Charles agreed to let Joan go to Orleans, where French forces were under siege. She left on April 30, 1429.

Her presence there had a swift and great effect. The English forts built to encircle the city were taken and the siege⁴ ended in an astonishing eight days. A month later, the French won again, at Patay. The following month, the French regained Troyes and then Reims. In an astounding three months, Joan of Arc had helped the French do what seemed impossible. The English were on the run.

Part 2: Success and the End

Though she was wounded twice in these many struggles, Joan fought on. She at first wanted to go home, especially after her first series of successes; but the army convinced her to stay.

The French progress bogged down⁵ as the English dug in. Joan and the French fought on, and so did the English. In May 1430, Joan was captured.

- [10] She was held in prison for many weeks and then brought to trial in Rouen, a French town in English possession. She was refused a lawyer and was treated cruelly in prison. At her trial, she insisted that the voices of angels had told her to help defend France against English invaders. This didn't go over too well with the English clergymen⁶ who were her judges. She was found guilty of heresy⁷ (largely because she claimed to have spoken with angels, which was against church law) and sentenced to be burned at the stake. She died on May 30, 1431.

Her story is still told for several reasons:

- She was but an inexperienced teenager, leading an army full of battle-hardened men.
- She was a woman. At that time, women were expected to stay in the homes and castles and let the men do the fighting.
- She had tremendous success. With her in the army, the French won victory after victory.
- She died a terrible death.

Her life and death have inspired many soldiers, in France and elsewhere, ever since.

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4. the placing of an army around a protected place or city to force it to surrender
5. to be stalled, delayed, or caught up in something
6. religious leaders
7. religious opinion that is opposed to a generally accepted belief of the church

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central idea of the text?
 - A. Never underestimate teenage girls.
 - B. Faith and courage led Joan to victory.
 - C. Joan of Arc was one of the most influential women in history.
 - D. The history of French-English relationships was changed by a peasant girl.

2. PART B: Cite evidence from the text to support the answer to Part A.

3. Explain how Joan convinced the French of her mission in 3-5 complete sentences.

4. PART A: What does the term “heresy” most likely mean as used in paragraph 10?
 - A. Going against church rules
 - B. Insulting the church
 - C. Lying about spiritual experiences
 - D. Practicing witchcraft

5. PART B: Which of the following best support the answer to Part A?
- A. "English clergymen... were her judges"
 - B. "claimed to have spoken with angels"
 - C. "against church law"
 - D. "sentenced to be burned at the stake"

